

A World Away

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/3318149) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/3318149>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - High School , Child Abuse , Hannibal is Mute , kinda angsty , Not A Happy Ending , Why Did I Write This? , This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things , Short Chapters , POV Alternating , Other Additional Tags to Be Added , ? - Freeform , why is a question mark freeform that's just stupid
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2015-02-09 Words: 2,314 Chapters: 6/?

A World Away

by [VisceralViscaria](#)

Summary

The first note was inconspicuous enough, scrawled in rough, jagged handwriting at the corner of his desk. It was hardly noteworthy considering just how much writing covered the flat tabletop, but something about it gave him pause. Maybe it was the way it had been written, shaky and uncertain, or that unlike the others it wasn't a rude message or symbol crudely etched into the wood, but either way it was enough to stop him from erasing it.

Hello?

Two boys who have never met connect in an unlikely place in an even unlikelier way.

Notes

When I have writers block I break it by writing the most random things, usually spawned by some kind of prompt though this time it came from a memory. Have you ever written a little message on a desk and wondered about the people that would see? I used to do that all the time. One time, someone answered me.

The last time I tried to break writer's block by writing something else I ended up with Wax Wings. This should be *much* shorter, fortunately. Still, it looks like I have a bad habit of breaking it with things that aren't exactly "cheery".

All of these chapters are pretty short, which is nice? I ended up using the whole "less is more" ideology.

While I haven't finished writing just yet, I know what I've planned for the ending. As the tags say, it isn't happy. But I might write a sequel....? Not sure yet.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Please take a long hard look through your textbook,

'Cause I'm history.

-Cave In, Owl City [[x](#)]

The first note was inconspicuous enough, scrawled in rough, jagged handwriting at the corner of his desk. It was hardly noteworthy considering just how much writing covered the flat tabletop, but something about it gave him pause. Maybe it was the way it had been written, shaky and uncertain, or that unlike the others it wasn't a rude message or symbol crudely etched into the wood, but either way it was enough to stop him from erasing it.

Hello?

Hannibal tilted his head to the side, studying the simple word in his usual silence. The hand holding his eraser hovered over it patiently. One swipe was all it would take to clean the distraction away. The odds were that some bored student from one of the earlier class periods had left it there during a lecture, the word completely meaningless, and *yet...*

Slowly setting his eraser down by his pen, he took up his pencil instead.

Hello. Who might you be?

Chapter 2



Will slid into his seat the next morning, slouching in on himself as he slowly placed his binder next to the textbook on his desk. Last night had been long and restless, nothing new unfortunately. Beneath his baggy sweater his ribs gave a dull throb. That morning they'd been a splotchy purple and blue, bruises spreading over his pale skin like flowers blooming in spring. That wasn't anything new either.

The teacher walked into the room and started the day's lesson by asking that they turn their homework in. Loud snaps and zips broke out immediately, followed by pages being torn from notebooks and chair legs scraping the tile floors. His classmates rose one by one and passed his seat at the front to add their papers to the stack forming on the teacher's desk. Will didn't move. He hadn't been able to finish it before his dad woke up. He rarely did.

Some kids went out of their way to bump him, others did it on accident, but he didn't complain, not even when they'd occasionally brush his side and trigger a sharp burst of pain. He just kept his eyes on his desk, fingers tracing the familiar ridges of a phone number someone had carved into its surface years ago. Suddenly he remembered his own little message. Flat eyes drifted over to it only to widen briefly.

Though he hadn't expected to find anything, neat, looping cursive filled the blank space beneath his own messy handwriting. He read the words, then read them again. *Who might you be?* After a moment's hesitation, he fished around in his bag for a pencil, pressing the nubby eraser to the wood.

Chapter 3

Hannibal was often left alone, by teachers and students alike. Each time he changed schools there were those who would try to befriend him, making what they seemed to think was a praiseworthy effort to greet and reach out to the new kid even though he never expressed any interest in them. They would always end up being the same, growing frustrated when his eyes flashed dangerously in the face of their pity and his hands said the searing words his mouth couldn't. He would not be coddled or patronized, but that was all that they were offering.

Bullies were much the same, only instead of advancing amicably they advanced with a violence that was pettier than anything. It never took long for them to learn that a lack of speech didn't mean a lack of strength. This time it had taken a broken pinky before they had gotten that message, but they had gotten it in the end.

Others knew better than to approach him by now, recognizing that he'd prefer they keep their distance. Aside from the occasional forced group interactions the school system used to 'build social skills', he spent most of his time alone and liked it that way. There were moments of loneliness to be sure. But he'd feel much lonelier with them than without them. Hannibal felt no need to seek companionship from those who couldn't understand.

Which was why it surprised him when he felt a tug of disappointment at the clean corner of his desk waiting for him the next day. The two lines had been sloppily erased, the only signs of their presence a few dark smudges leftover where someone hadn't taken the time to properly wipe them away. They bothered him for some reason. Again his fingers wrapped around the white eraser he reserved for drawing, its higher quality material making quick work of the lingering graphite stains.

It was only when he'd finished that he noticed a similarly smudged space a few inches away. His hand automatically went to erase it before freezing over the desk once again. A familiar scrawl took the place of what had been a drawing of an anatomically inaccurate penis yesterday. Hannibal's eyes traced over the clipped sentence with uncharacteristic fondness.

Who's asking? -W.G.

The tip of his pencil lazily slid over the space beneath it, politely left blank. He didn't know it yet, only hearing a hushed comment about it at the end of class, but he was smiling.

Chapter 4



He was strangely nervous that morning. Will took more time than usual to get out his things, covering as much space on his desk as he could though he carefully avoided the corner; wouldn't want to risk smudging.

The thought brought a scowl to his face. This was stupid. He shouldn't expect an answer, shouldn't expect *anything*. Some kid probably thought it would be fun to pass what amounted to a long-distance note. They might do a back-and-forth with him for a few days, but then they'd stop replying. Better to kill the fragile little hope unfurling in his chest now than later.

Still, he didn't look. His eyes skimmed down the wood when he wasn't thinking, almost settling on the spot before he yanked his head up to the board. He was even more antsy than usual, his fingers wiggling his pen, then tapping on the desk, then drumming at his thigh. Will didn't know what was wrong with him or why he wouldn't just go ahead and look, but he didn't. It was only in the last five minutes of class that he finally gave in to the temptation to peek. He shifted his paper a few inches to the left. And stared quietly.

There wasn't much time to think of a reply but he managed to scratch one down just before the bell rang. Shoveling his things into his bag, he made it out of the room faster than he normally did. For the rest of the day, whenever he thought back to the desk he felt a burst of... giddiness? It was horrible, but those two words stuck with him.

A friend. -H.L.

Chapter 5

The weekend had never seemed quite so *long* before. Time was determined to stretch itself from one day to the next, and while he was fully capable of filling it with all of his usual activities, that didn't mean that he couldn't be distracted every now and then. For example, he might be reading a book with absolutely no relation to his situation or himself only to find a word or phrase that took him back to the desk, to the stranger sitting there before him every day. Or what should've been a momentary glance out of the flat's windows, several stories up, would have him watching the bustling throng of people move through Baltimore's streets with the thought that one of them could be W.G.

Hannibal had been absent on Friday, having to attend a doctor's appointment followed by a therapy session. Both were absolutely pointless and revealed nothing they hadn't known before, the therapy session in particular. Dr. Hertz was useless, thinking that because he was young he would be simple-minded and easy to manipulate. Hannibal would have *loved* to have told the man exactly what he thought of him, but held himself in check. Doing so would be just as pointless as not doing it, and was rude either way. Ordinarily he could miss school for these sessions with a sort of neutral acceptance, but now he found the lost hours to be a waste.

His aunt and uncle had picked up on his frustrations, but when asked about it he would only shake his head. There wasn't a way to explain it properly, not even to himself. Why would he, someone who had never wished for a companion, suddenly desire a friend? He knew nothing of this student, not even their name. Just that rough, abominable handwriting. Thinking of the slants and the way they must have held the pencil had his lips quirking upward at the corners. They rose further still when he thought of what the reply could be.

This was getting ridiculous, he knew, but he couldn't deny that he was curious. W.G. was something of a mystery, being the first to reach out and then reacting with caution and suspicion when reached for in turn. Would most people have shared their name, their first name at the very least? Yes, he thought so. So why hadn't W.G.? He had no way of knowing. Which was why he found them so fascinating.

Monday rolled around in its own due time. The day seemed to drag itself out, each class boring compared to what waited at the end of the day. It was only as he walked into the room that he realized the other would have no way of knowing why he hadn't answered previously. Somewhat anxious, he quickly crossed over to the desk and scanned it for their writing.

Again it had been erased, and again he found another cleared space just big enough for two lines of writing. Both were filled.

I don't find you that interesting. -W.G.

And apparently you felt the same.

Blinking slowly, he slid off his messenger bag and placed it on the ground by his seat. A small frown formed on his face. This wouldn't do at all. While the first message was slightly amusing, the second filled his mouth with a surprisingly bitter taste. It was time to correct W.G.'s mistake.

Chapter 6



Will dropped his bag to the floor harshly, not bothering to be gentle with it as he usually was - he knew full well that he wouldn't get a replacement any time soon. His weekend had gone terribly. First there hadn't been a reply on Friday, then his dad had brought home another woman, and then they proceeded to fight and scream every night while he was trying to sleep. He'd only gotten two out of five assignments done and had more than a few bruises to show for his "dedication". His father's slurred words still rang through his ears mockingly.

"You thin' you're better 'an me, huh? What, jus' 'cause you go to school and get good grades? They tell ya you're smart, Willy? Well tha's gonna do you real good 'til you get to college and got no money. You're gonna be jus' like me, kid. Just like your old man." His dad stumbled his way over to the couch, beer bottle in one hand and a giggling blonde in the other, and pulled a long chug. "Stop wastin' your time and get me and my lady a drink."

"Yes sir, but..." Will shuffled from foot to foot, head down just as he'd been taught. You don't make eye contact, you don't question orders, you don't do something that'll get you hit. He'd learned that the hard way. But he needed this, he needed to do as much work as he could if he wanted to keep those good grades he'd been working for. And he had been working, taking late night shifts at a local convenience store and squirreling away every paycheck. Not that his dad knew that. Not that his dad knew anything about him. He wasn't going to become his father. He was going to graduate and, hopefully, get a scholarship, any scholarship. Just as long as he could get away. "I need to write a paper tonight, so... could you..."

The beer bottle crashed into the wall by his head. A shard of glass flew away and left a small cut on his cheek. It stung, and he could feel a thin trickle of blood roll over his skin and drip onto his shirt. He never moved, if anything going ramrod straight.

"Boy, didn't you hear me?! That shit is worthless! You wanna make a living? Learn a trade. Come work at the garage. You're lucky I let you go to that goddamn school. You should be working with me, making some money! You're just another hungry mouth to feed. Now clean that up and get me my drink."

The memory brought the first pinprick of tears to the corners of his eyes, but he willed them away and blinked a few times. Sitting down seemed like a good idea. His feet hurt, his cheek hurt, his back hurt, and now his head had decided to chime in. Tiredness seeped from his bones. He was about to put his head on his desk and try to get some sleep when he noticed his two lines of writing had been replaced.

I apologize for Friday, I am absent then during this period every two weeks. You are very interesting, and I hope that someday you will feel the same about me. - H.L.

Will took in the now-familiar swirls quietly, marveling at the two simple sentences that had brought him so much instant relief. The tears threatened to fall again for entirely different reasons, and he lifted a dingy jacket sleeve to angrily rub at his face. His eyes lingered on the words 'I hope'. He grabbed his pencil and started scribbling.

End Notes

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